

that existed in the past and also because of our cooperation as allies, that these cannot be taken for granted these days anymore. So it's going to be essential for us not to only talk at governmental level—it's a good experience, obviously—but that also our societies have to be engaged, that they have to understand that we need their contribution, too, to have good relations. And I think I made a little start in the right direction. So in about six months you may ask me again whether I've been able to add a few more chapters to it.

President Bush. We've got something in common; we both didn't exactly landslide our way into office. [*Laughter*]

I'm convinced that we will have a really important and good relationship.

First, I do want to send my best regards to Gerhard Schroeder. We spent a lot of time together, and we talked about important issues. Listen, there was room for agreement and room for disagreement. And I do hope he's doing well.

Our job now is to work together. We've got big interests. Germany is a really important country. It's right in the heart of Europe; it's vital that Germany take the lead on a lot of issues. And I look forward to working with the Chancellor on common objectives. And my first impressions, with 45 minutes alone in the Oval Office, were incredibly positive. She's smart—[*laughter*—she's plenty capable. She's got kind of a spirit to her that is appealing. She loves freedom.

I was particularly touched by hearing about her early life in Communist Germany. There's something uplifting to talk to somebody who knows the difference between just talking about tyranny and living in freedom and actually done it.

So we're going to have a very good relationship. And that's important for our respective people. I'm looking forward to consultations, visits, contacts, phone calls, all the things you do. And now I'm going to take her to lunch. [*Laughter*]

Thank you.

Chancellor Merkel. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:37 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; President Mahmud

Ahmadinejad of Iran; Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Wang Guangya; and former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany. Chancellor Merkel and two reporters spoke in German, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this news conference.

Remarks Following a Meeting Business Leaders on Central American Relief and Reconstruction Efforts

January 13, 2006

I want to thank Secretary Rice and Ambassador Hughes for joining three of our Nation's most distinguished business leaders here at the White House to discuss a very important project, and that's raising money for those affected by the storms and natural disaster in Guatemala and Honduras.

Ours is a Nation that when we see human suffering, we respond. And we responded at the governmental level, because we had our military help provide infrastructure and logistics and get supplies to people who were hurting. We helped through USAID. And now it's time for the private sector in our country to step up and support the efforts of those Guatemalans struggling to get their lives back together and those in Honduras doing the same thing.

The fund that's going to be raised is made up of private donations. People can find out more about it on what's called—a web site called hurricaneaction.org. I think the site went up today, if I'm not mistaken. It's a place for people to come and access and to find out how they can join other Americans as to how to contribute. The money will go for things such as education of displaced families or infrastructure rebuilding, with a particular emphasis on reforestation or on microloans to help the economy get back on its feet in these countries.

So I want to thank you all very much for coming. I appreciate your interest. Thank you for traveling down to the region to take an assessment of the needs. And most importantly, thanks for coming back and calling our citizens to action. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:34 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

January 7

During the day, the President traveled to Camp David, MD, where he had an intelligence briefing.

January 8

In the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC.

January 9

In the morning, in the Private Dining Room, the President had breakfast with Supreme Court Associate Justice-designate Samuel A. Alito, Jr. Later, he had an intelligence briefing.

Later in the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with Vice President Dick Cheney to wish him well after his brief hospital visit earlier that morning. He and Mrs. Bush then traveled to Glen Burnie, MD, where they visited with students at North Glen Elementary School before returning to Washington, DC.

In the evening, in the Cabinet Room, the President met with Vice President Cheney, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and combatant commanders to discuss U.S. military operations around the world. Later, in the Residence, he hosted a reception and dinner for members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and combatant commanders.

The President announced his designation of the following individuals as members of a Presidential delegation to Astana, Kazakhstan, to attend the Inauguration of President Nursultan Nazarbayev on January 11: Mike Johanns (head of delegation); John

M. Ordway; Josette Sheeran Shinger; and Timothy D. Adams.

The President announced his recess appointment of Steven Kent Mullins as U.S. Attorney for the District of South Dakota.

January 10

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, in the Oval Office, the President participated in a photo opportunity with the 2005 Little League Softball World Series champions.

The President declared a major disaster in Oklahoma and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by an extreme wildfire threat on December 1, 2005, and continuing.

January 11

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Then, in the Oval Office, he participated in a signing ceremony for the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement.

Later in the morning, the President traveled to Louisville, KY, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Bob Manning.

In the afternoon, at the Kentucky International Convention Center, the President met with family members of a soldier killed in Iraq. Later, he returned to Washington, DC.

The President declared a major disaster in Texas and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by an extreme wildfire threat beginning on December 1, 2005, and continuing.

January 12

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel to express his concern for the health of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel and to wish the acting Prime Minister well. Later, he had an intelligence briefing.

Later in the morning, the President traveled to New Orleans, LA. While en route aboard Air Force One, he had a telephone conversation with Supreme Court Associate